

Organic Production:

Using NRCS Practice Standards to Support Organic Growers

Practice Fact Sheets



Overview

The Organic Initiative

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill) has for the first time included provisions supporting transition to organic agriculture and tailoring conservation programs to organic production. This Farm Bill provides substantial funding for organic farmers to participate in USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program administered by NRCS. These provisions and funding are prompting the organic community to seek NRCS assistance for transitioning new acreage and producers to organic systems. Without doubt NRCS involvement in organic production systems is increasing, and conservation planners will have an expanding opportunity to promote the Agency's resource protection objectives to this new audience.

NRCS assistance to the organic community will be based on its time-tested conservation planning process to identify conservation practices that solve resource concerns at the field level. Each conservation practice has a standard that provides specific implementation guidance. The standard must be followed to ensure the practice is applied correctly and achieves the desired results.

In 2002, USDA adopted National Organic Program (NOP) standards that must be met for farmers and food processors to be "certified organic"

and thus use the USDA organic label on their agricultural products. The NOP standards include requirements and provide guidance for plant nutrient use, management of pests, crop rotation, and other production practices. The NOP standard constitutes the criteria used by organic certifying agencies and inspectors.

An emphasis on integrating stewardship activities with the rules of organic production raises two questions that conservation planners may face as they provide assistance to organic growers:

1. What are the differences between a specific NRCS practice standard and its related National Organic Program standard?
2. How will NRCS practice standards be used to assist growers that are already in or transitioning to organic production?

The practice-based fact sheets in this series answer these questions by: 1) directly comparing NRCS and NOP standards, and 2) providing examples that show how NRCS practice standards can work in harmony with organic certification, while still achieving the resource protection goals of the Agency.

